

## THE SWEET USES OF ADVERSITY

### NO. 283

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 BY THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON,  
 AT THE MUSIC HALL, ROYAL SURREY GARDENS.

*“Show me why You contend with me.”*  
*Job 10:2.*

AND will God contend with man? If God is angry, can He not take away the breath of his nostrils and lay him low in the dust of earth? If the heart of the Almighty is moved unto hot displeasure, can He not speak in His anger and will not the soul of man sink into the lowest Hell? Will God contend—will He set himself in battle array against His creature? And such a creature?—the creature of an hour—a thing that is not, that is here today and gone tomorrow? Will the Almighty contend with the nothingness of man? Will the Everlasting God take up the weapons of war and go out to fight against the insect of a day? Well might we cry out to Him, “After whom is my Lord the King gone forth? After a dead dog—after a flea?” Will You hunt the partridge on the mountains with an army and will You go forth against a gnat with shield and spear? Shall the Everlasting God who faints not, neither is weary, at whose reproof the pillars of Heaven’s starry roof tremble and start—will He become combatant with a creature? Yet our text says so. It speaks of God’s contending with man! Ah, surely, my Brothers and Sisters, it needs but little logic to understand that this not a contention of anger, but a contention of *love!* It needs, I think, but a short sight for us to discover that if God contends with man, it must be a contention of *mercy!* There must be a design of love in this. If He were angry, He would not condescend to reason with His creature and to have a strife of words with him. Much less would He put on His buckler and lay hold on His sword, to stand up in battle and contend with such a creature as man! You will all perceive at once that there must be love even in this apparently angry word! This contention must, after all, have something to do with *contentment* and that this battle must be, after all, but a disguised mercy—but another shape of an embrace from the God of Love! Carry this consoling reflection in your thoughts while I am preaching to you. And if any of you are saying, today, “Show me why You contend with me,” the very fact of God contending with you at all—the fact that He has not consumed you—that He has not smitten you to the lowest Hell, may thus, at the very outset, afford consolation and hope!

Now, I propose to address myself to the two classes of persons who are making use of this question. First, I shall speak to *the tried saint*. And then I shall speak to *the seeking sinner*, who has been seeking peace and pardon through Christ, but who has not as yet found it, but, on the contrary, has been buffeted by the Law and driven away from the Mercy Seat in despair.

**I.** First, then, to THE CHILD OF GOD. I have—I know I have—in this great assembly, some who have come to Job’s position. They are saying, “My soul is weary of my life. I will leave my complaint upon myself. I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. I will say unto God, Do not condemn me! Show me why You contend with me.” Sometimes to question God is wicked. As the men of Bethshemesh were smitten with death when they dared to lift up the lid of the Ark and look into its sacred mysteries, so is it often death to our faith to question God. It often happens that the sorest plagues come upon us on account of an impudent curiosity which longs to pry between the folded leaves of God’s great council book and find out the reason for His mysterious Providences. But, I think *this* is a question that may be asked. Inquiring here will not be merely curious—for there will be a practical affect following. Tried Saint, follow me while I seek to look into this mystery and answer your question, and I pray you select one of several answers which I shall propound, which shall, to your judgment, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, seem to be the right one. You have been tried by trouble after trouble—business runs cross against you—sickness is never out of your house—while in your own person you are the continuous subject of a sad depression of spirit. It seems as if God were contending with you and you are asking, “Why is this? Show me why You contend with me?”

**1.** My first answer on God’s part, my Brothers and Sisters, is this—it may be that God is contending with you that He may show His own power in upholding you. God delights in His saints. And when a man delights in his child, if it is a child noted for its brightness of intellect, he delights to see it put through hard questions—because he knows that it will

be able to answer them all. So God glories in His children. He loves to hear them tried, that the whole world may see that there are none like them on the face of the earth and even Satan may be compelled, before he can find an accusation against them, to resort to his inexhaustible fund of lies. Sometimes God on purpose puts His children in the midst of this world's trials. On the right, left, before, behind, they are surrounded. Within and without the battle rages. But there stands the child of God, calm amidst the bewildering cry, confident of victory. And then the Lord points joyously to His saint and He says, "See, Satan, he is more than a match for you! Weak though he is, yet through My power, he can perform all things." And sometimes God permits Satan, himself, to come against one of His children. And the black fiend of Hell in dragon's wings meets a poor Christian just when he is faint and weary from stumbling in the Valley of Humiliation. The fight is long and terrible and, well it may be, for it is a *worm* combating with *the dragon*. But see what that worm can do! It is trod under foot and yet it destroys the heel that treads upon it! When the Christian is cast down, he utters a cry, "Rejoice not over me, O my enemy, for though I fall, yet shall I rise again." And so God points to His child and says, "See there? See what I can do? I can make flesh and blood more mighty than the most cunning spirit. I can make poor feeble, foolish *man*, more than a match for all the craft and might of Satan."

And what will you say to this third proof that God puts us through? Sometimes God does, as it were, *Himself* enter into the fight—oh, let us wonder to say it! God, to prove the strength of faith, sometimes Himself makes war on faith! Think not that this is a stretch of the imagination. It is plain simple fact. Have you ever heard of the brook Jabbok and of that angel-clothed God who fought with Jacob there and permitted Jacob to prevail? What was this for? It was thus had God determined—"I will strengthen the creature so much, that I will permit it to overcome its Creator." Oh, what noble work is this, that while God is casting down His child with one hand, He should be holding him up with the other—letting a measure of Omnipotence fall on him to crush him, while the same Omnipotence supports him under the tremendous load! The Lord shows the world—"See what faith can do? "Well does Hart sing of faith—

*"It treads on the world and on Hell!  
It vanquishes death and despair!  
And, O! Let us wonder to tell,  
It overcomes Heaven by prayer!"*

This is why God contends with you—to glorify Himself, by showing to angels, to men, to devils, how He can put such strength into poor puny man—that man can contend with his Maker and become a prevailing prince like Israel, who as a prince had power of God and prevailed! This, then, may be the first reason.

2. Let me give you a second answer. Perhaps, O tried Soul, the Lord is doing this to develop your Graces. There are some of your Graces that would never be discovered if it were not for your trials. Do you not know that your faith never looks so grand in summer weather, as it does in winter? Have you not heard that love is too often like a glowworm that shows but little light except it is in the midst of surrounding darkness? And do you not know that hope, itself, is like a star—not to be seen in the sunshine of prosperity and only to be discovered in the night of adversity? Do you not understand that afflictions are often the black foils in which God sets the jewels of His children's Graces, to make them shine the better? It was but a little while ago that on your knees you were saying, "Lord, I fear I have no faith—let me know that I have faith." But do you not know you were praying for *trials*? You cannot know that you have faith until your faith is exercised! Our trials, so to speak, are like wayfarers in a forest; when there is no intruder in the silent glades of the forest, the hare and the partridge lie still; and there they rest and no eye sees them. But when the intruding footsteps are heard, then you see them start and run along the green lane and you hear the whirr of the pheasant as it seeks to hide itself! Now, our trials are intruders upon our heart's rest. Our Graces start up and we discover them! They would have lain in their lair, they would have slept in their forms, they would have rested in their nests—unless these intruding trials had startled them from their places!

I remember a simple rural metaphor used by a departed divine. He says he was never very skillful at birds' nesting in the summer time, but he could always find birds' nests in the winter. Now, it often happens that when a man has but little Grace, you can scarcely see it when the leaves of his prosperity are on him. But let the winter's blast come and sweep away his withered leaves and then you discover his Graces—depend upon it, God often sends us trials that our Graces may be discovered and that we may be certified of their existence! Besides, it is not merely discovery, it is real growth that is the result of these trials. There is a little plant, small and stunted, growing under the shade of a broad spreading oak. And this little plant values the shade which covers it and greatly does it esteem the quiet rest which its noble friend affords. But a blessing is designed for this little plant. Once upon a time there comes along the woodman and with his sharp axe

he fells the oak. The plant weeps and cries, “My shelter is departed—every rough wind will blow upon me and every storm will seek to uproot me.” “No, no,” says the angel of that flower, “now will the sun get at you. Now will the showers fall on you in more copious abundance than before; now your stunted form shall spring up into loveliness and your flower, which could never have expanded itself to perfection, shall now laugh in the sunshine and men shall say, ‘How greatly has that plant increased! How glorious has its beauty become through the removal of that which was its shade and its delight!’” Don’t you see, then, that God may take away your comforts and your privileges to make you a better Christian? Why, the Lord always trains His soldiers, not by letting them lie on feather beds, but by turning them out and using them in forced marches and hard service! He makes them ford through streams and swim through rivers and climb mountains and walk many a long march with heavy knapsacks of sorrow on their backs. This is the way in which He makes soldiers—not by dressing them up in fine uniforms, to swagger at the barrack gates and to be fine gentlemen in the eyes of the loungers in the park! God knows that soldiers are only to be made in battle. They are not to be grown in peaceful times. We may grow the stuff of which soldiers are made, but warriors are really educated by the smell of powder, in the midst of whizzing bullets and roaring cannonades—not in soft and peaceful times.

Well, Christian, may not this account for it all? Is not your Lord bringing out your Graces and making them grow? This is the reason why He is contending with you.

3. Another reason may be found in this. It may be the Lord contends with you because you have some secret sin which is doing you sore damage. Do you remember the story of Moses? Never was a man more beloved than he of the Lord, his God, for he was faithful in all his house as a servant. But do you remember how the Lord met him on the way as he was going to Egypt and strove with him? And why? Because he had in his house an uncircumcised child. This child was, so long as it had not God’s seal upon it, a sin in Moses! Therefore God strove with him till the thing was done. Now, too often we have some uncircumcised thing in our house, some joy that is evil, some amusement that is sinful, some pursuit that is not agreeable to His will. And the Lord meets us often as He did Moses, of whom it is written—“The Lord met him by the way in the inn and sought to kill him”—Exodus 4:24. Now search and look, for if the consolation of God is small with you, there is some secret sin within! Put it away, lest God smite you still more sorely and vex you in His hot displeasure. Trials often discover sins—sins we would never have found out if it had not been for them. We know that the houses in Russia are very greatly infested with rats and mice. Perhaps a stranger would scarcely notice them at first, but the time when you discover them is when the house is on fire. Then they pour out in multitudes! And so does God sometimes burn up our comforts to make our hidden sins run out—and then He enables us to knock them on the head and get rid of them! That may be the reason of your trial—to put an end to some long-fostered sin. It may be, too, that in this way God would prevent some future sin, some sin hidden from your own eyes into which you would soon fall if it were not for His troubling you by His Providence.

There was a fair ship which belonged to the great Master of the seas; it was about to sail from the Port of Grace to the Haven of Glory. Before it left the shore, the great Master said, “Mariners, be brave! Captain, be bold! For not a hair of your head shall perish. I will bring you safely to your desired haven. The angel of the winds is commissioned to take care of you on your way.” The ship sailed right merrily with its streamers flying in the air. It floated along at a swift rate with a fair wind for many and many a day. But once upon a time there came a hurricane which drove them from the course, strained their mast until it bent as if it must snap in two. The sail was shred to ribbons! The sailors were alarmed and the captain, himself, trembled. They had lost their course. “They were out of the right track,” they said. And they mourned exceedingly. When the day dawned, the waves were quiet and the angel of the winds appeared. And they spoke unto him and said, “Oh angel, were you not bid to take charge of us and preserve us on our journeys?” He answered, “It was even so and I have done it. You were steering on right confidently and you knew not that a little ahead of your vessel lay a quicksand upon which she would be wrecked and swallowed up quickly. I saw that there was no way for your escape but to drive you from your course. See, I have done as it was commanded me—go on your way.” Ah, this is a parable of our Lord’s dealings with us! He often drives us from our smooth course which we thought was the right track to Heaven. But there is a secret reason for it—there is a quicksand ahead that is not marked in the chart. We know nothing about it. But God sees it and He will not permit this fair vessel, which He has Himself insured, to be stranded anywhere! He will bring it safely to its desired haven.

4. I have now another reason to give, but it is one which some of you will not understand. Some however will. Beloved, you remember that it is written, that we “must bear the image of the heavenly,” namely, the image of Christ. As He was in this world, even so must we be. We must have fellowship with Him in His sufferings, that we may be conforma-

ble unto His death. Have you never thought that none can be like the Man of Sorrow unless they have sorrows, too? How can you be like He, who sweat, as it were, great drops of blood, if you do not sometimes say, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death”? Think not, O Beloved, that you can be like our thorn-crowned Head, and yet never feel the thorns. Can you be like your dying Lord and yet be uncrucified? Must your hands be without a nail and your feet without a wound? Can you be like He, unless, like He, you are compelled to say, “My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?” God is chiseling you—you are but a rough block—He is making you into the image of Christ! And that sharp chisel is taking away much which prevents your being like He. Must He who is our Head be marred in His visage by reason of grief and must we forever rejoice and sing? It cannot be—

*“The heirs of salvation, I know from His Word,  
Through much tribulation must follow their Lord.”*

Sweet is the affliction which gives us fellowship with Christ! Blessed is the plow that plows deep furrows—if the furrows are like His! Blessed is the mouth that spits upon us, if the spittle is for the same cause as that which defiled His face! Blessed are the nails and thorns and vinegar and spear, if they but make us somewhat like He, in whose Glory we shall be partakers when we shall see Him as He is! This is a matter which all cannot understand, for it is a path which no unhallowed foot has trod and no careless eye has so much as seen. But the true Believer can rejoice in it, for he has had fellowship with Christ in His sufferings.

5. To the child of God I shall give only one more reason. The Lord, it may be, contends with you, my Brothers and Sisters, to humble you. We are all too proud. The most humble of us do but approach to the door of true humility. We are too proud, for pride, I suppose, runs in our very veins and is not to be gotten out of us any more than the marrow from our bones. We shall have many blows before we are brought down to the right mark. And it is because we are so continually getting up that God is so continually putting us down again! Besides, don't you feel, in looking back on your past troubles, that you have, after all, been best when you have had troubles? I can truly say there is a mournfulness in joy and there is a sweet joy in sorrow. I do not know how it is, but that bitter wine of sorrow, when you once get it down, gives such a warmth to the inner man as even the wine of Lebanon can scarcely afford. It acts with such a tonic influence upon the whole system, that the very veins begin to thrill as the blood leaps in it. Strange influence! I am no physician, but yet I know that my sweet cup often leaves bitterness on the palate and my bitter cup always leaves a sweet flavor in the mouth. There is a sweet joy in sorrow I cannot understand. There is music in this harp with its strings all unstrung and broken. There are a few notes I hear from this mournful lute that I never get from the loud-sounding trumpet. Softness and melody we get from the wail of sorrow, which we never get from the song of joy. Must we not account for this by the fact that in our troubles we live nearer to God? Our joy is like the wave as it dashes upon the shore—it throws us on the earth. But our sorrows are like that receding wave which sucks us back again into the great depth of the Godhead. We would have been stranded and left high and dry upon the shore if it had not been for that receding wave, that ebbing of our prosperity, which again carried us back to our Father and to our God! Blessed affliction! It has brought us to the Mercy Seat—given life to prayer; it has enkindled love—strengthened faith—brought Christ into the furnace with us and then brought us out of the furnace to live with Christ more joyously than before! Surely, I cannot answer this question better. If I have not hit upon the right reason, search and look, my dearly Beloved. for the reason is not far off if you but look for it—the reason why He contends with you.

II. I have thus done with the saints. I shall now turn myself to address THE SEEKING SINNER who is wondering why he has found no peace and comfort. By the way—running a little apart from the subject—I heard a Brother saying the other evening in describing his experience, that before he was converted, he was never sick, never had an affliction at all, but from the very hour when he became converted, he found that trials and troubles came upon him very thick! I have been thinking of that ever since and I think I have found a reason for it. When we are converted, it is the time of the singing of birds. But do you know the time of the singing of birds is the time of the pruning of vines and as sure as the time of the singing of birds is come, the time of the pruning of vines is come also. God begins to try us as soon as He begins to make our soul sing! This is not running away from the subject. I thought it was. It has just brought me to address the sinner. You have come here this morning saying to yourself, “Sir, not long ago I was awakened to a sense of my lost estate. As I was directed, I went home and sought mercy in prayer. From that day till now I have never ceased to pray. But, alas, I get no comfort, Sir! I grow worse than ever I was before—I mean I grow more desponding, more sad. If you had asked me before conviction, Sir, whether the path to Heaven was easy, I would have said, ‘yes.’ But now it seems to me to be strewn with flints. That I would not mind but, alas, I think the gate is shut which lies at the end of the road—for I

have knocked and it has never opened! I have asked and I have not received. I have sought and I have not found. In fact, instead of getting peace I receive terror! God is contending with me! Can you tell me, Sir, why it is?" I will try to answer the question, God helping me.

1. My first answer shall be this. Perhaps, my dear Hearer, God is contending with you for a while, because as yet you are not thoroughly awakened. Remember, Christ will not heal your wound till He has probed it to its very core. Christ is no unqualified physician, no foolish surgeon, who would close up a wound with proud flesh in it; but He will take the lances and cut and cut and cut again crossways and He will lay the sore open, expose it, look into it, make it smart. And then after that, He will close up its mouth and make it whole! Perhaps you have not as yet known your own vileness, your own lost state. Now, Christ will have you know your poverty before He will make you rich! His Holy Spirit will convince you of sin, of righteousness and of judgment to come. He will strip you and though the pulling off of your own righteousness is like flaying you and tearing off the skin, yet He will do it; for He will not clothe you with the robe of His own righteousness till every rag of your own self-sufficiency is pulled away! This is why God is contending with you. You have been on your knees. Go lower, Man—go lower! Fall flat on your face. You have said, "Lord, I am nothing." Go lower, Man—say, "Lord, I am less than nothing and the very chief of sinners." You have felt somewhat—go ask that you may feel more; may be yet more fully convicted of sin—may learn to hate it with a more perfect hatred and to bewail your lost estate with a wailing like that of Ramah, when Rachel wept for her children and would not be comforted because they were not! Seek to know the bottom of your case. Make it a matter of conscience to look your sins in the face and let Hell also blaze before you! Realize the fact that you deserve to be lost forever! Sit down often and take counsel with the Lord, your God, whom you have grievously offended. Think of your privileges and how you have despised them. Remember the invitations you have heard and how often you have rejected them. Get a proper sense of sin and it may be that God will cease to contend with you, because the good is all obtained which He sought to give you by this long and painful contention.

2. Another answer I will give you is this—perhaps God contends with you in order to try your earnestness. There are many Mr. Pliables, who set out on the road to Heaven for a little time and the first boggy piece of road they come to, they creep out on that side which is nearest to their own house and go back. Now, God meets every pilgrim on the road to Heaven and contends with him. If you can hold your own and say, "Though He slay me yet will I trust in Him;" if you can dare to do it and be importunate with God and say, "Though He never hear me, if I perish I will pray and perish only there;" then you have got the mastery and you shall succeed. God's Spirit is teaching you how to wrestle and agonize in prayer! I have seen a man, when he has become solemnly in earnest about his soul, pray as though he was a very Samson, with the two gates of mercy in his hands, rocking them to and fro as though he would sooner pull them up—gates and bar and all—than he would go away without obtaining a blessing! God loves to see a man mighty in prayer, intent upon getting the blessing, resolved that he will have Christ, or he will perish seeking Him. Now, be in earnest! Cry aloud! Spare not! Rise in the night-watches! Pour out your heart like water before the Lord, for He will answer you when He has heard the voice of your crying! He will listen to your supplication and give you the desire of your heart!

3. Yet, again, another matter. May it not be, my dear Hearers, that the reason why God contends with you and does not give you peace is because you are harboring some sin? Now, I will not say what it is. I have known a man solemnly under conviction of sin, but the company which he kept on market day was of such a caste, that until he was separated entirely from his companions, it was not possible he should have peace. I do not know what your peculiar besetting sin may be. It may be a love for frivolity; it may be the desire to associate with those who amuse you; it may be worse. But remember, Christ and your soul will never be one till you and your sins are two! Your desires and longings must make a clean sweep of the devil and all his crew, or else Christ will not come and dwell with you! "Well," says one, "but I cannot be *perfect*." No, but you cannot find peace till you *desire* to be! Wherever you harbor a sin, there you harbor misery. One sin willfully indulged in and not forsaken by true repentance will destroy the soul! Sins given up are like goods cast out at sea by the mariners in days of storm; they lighten the ship and the ship will never float till you have thrown all your sins overboard. There is no hope whatever for you till you can truly say—

*"Whatever consists not with Your love,  
O help me to resign!  
The dearest idol I have known,  
Whatever that idol is,  
Help me to tear it from its throne,*

***And worship only You.”***

4. Then drawing near to a conclusion, let me have your most solemn attention while I give one more hint as to the reason why you have not yet found peace. My dear Hearers, perhaps it is because you do not thoroughly understand the plan of salvation. I do feel that all ministers—and here, perhaps, I am as great a sinner as any other and I condemn myself while I chastise others—we, all of us, do in some way or other, I fear, help to dim the luster of God’s Grace, as manifested in the Cross of Christ. Often am I afraid lest I should prefer Calvinism to Calvary; lest I should put the sinner’s sense of need like a quickset hedge round the Cross and keep the poor sinner from getting as near as he would to the bleeding Lamb of God! Ah, my dear Hearers, remember if you would be saved, your salvation comes wholly and entirely from Jesus Christ, the dying Son of God! View Him yonder, Sinner, sweating in the Garden! See the red drops of blood as they fall from that dear face! Oh, see Him, Sinner, see Him in Pilate’s Hall! View the streams of gore as they gush from those lacerated shoulders! See Him, Sinner, see Him on His Cross! View that head still marked with the wounds with which the thorns pierced His temples! Oh, view that face emaciated and marred! See the spit still hanging there—the spit of cruel mockers! See the eyes floating in tears with languid pity! Look, too, at those hands and view them as they stream like fountains of blood! Oh, stand and listen while He cries, “Lama Sabachthani!” Sinner, your life is in Him who died! Your healing is in yonder wounds! Your salvation is in His destruction!

“Oh,” says one, “but I cannot believe.” Ah, Brother, that was once my mournful cry! But I will tell you how I came to believe. Once upon a time, I was trying to *make myself* believe and a voice whispered, “Vain Man, vain Man, if you would believe, come and look!” Then the Holy Spirit led me by the hand to a solitary place. And while I stood there, suddenly there appeared before me One upon His Cross! I looked up. I had then no faith. I saw His eyes suffused with tears and the blood still flowing—I saw His enemies about Him hunting Him to His grave. I marked His unutterable miseries. I heard the groaning which cannot be described. And as I looked up, He opened his eyes and said to me, “The Son of Man is come into the world to seek and to save those who are lost.” I clapped my hands and I said, “Jesus, I do believe! I must believe what You have said! I could not believe before, but the sight of You has breathed faith into my soul! I dare not doubt—it were treason; it were high treason to doubt Your power to save!” Dissolved by His agonies, I fell on the ground and embraced His feet and when I fell, my sins also fell! And I rejoiced in Divine Love that blots out sin and saves from death!

Oh my Friend, you will never get faith by trying to *make yourself* have it. Faith is the gift of Christ! Go and find it in His veins! There is a secret spot where faith is treasured up; it is in the heart of Christ—go and catch it, Sinner, as it flows from there! Go to your chamber and sit down and picture Christ in holy vision, dying on the tree, and as your eyes see, your heart shall melt, your soul shall believe and you shall rise from your knees and cry, “I know whom I may believe and I am persuaded He is able to save that which I have committed to Him until that day.”

And now, may the love of Christ Jesus and the Grace of His Father and the fellowship of His Spirit be with you forever and ever. Amen and Amen!

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